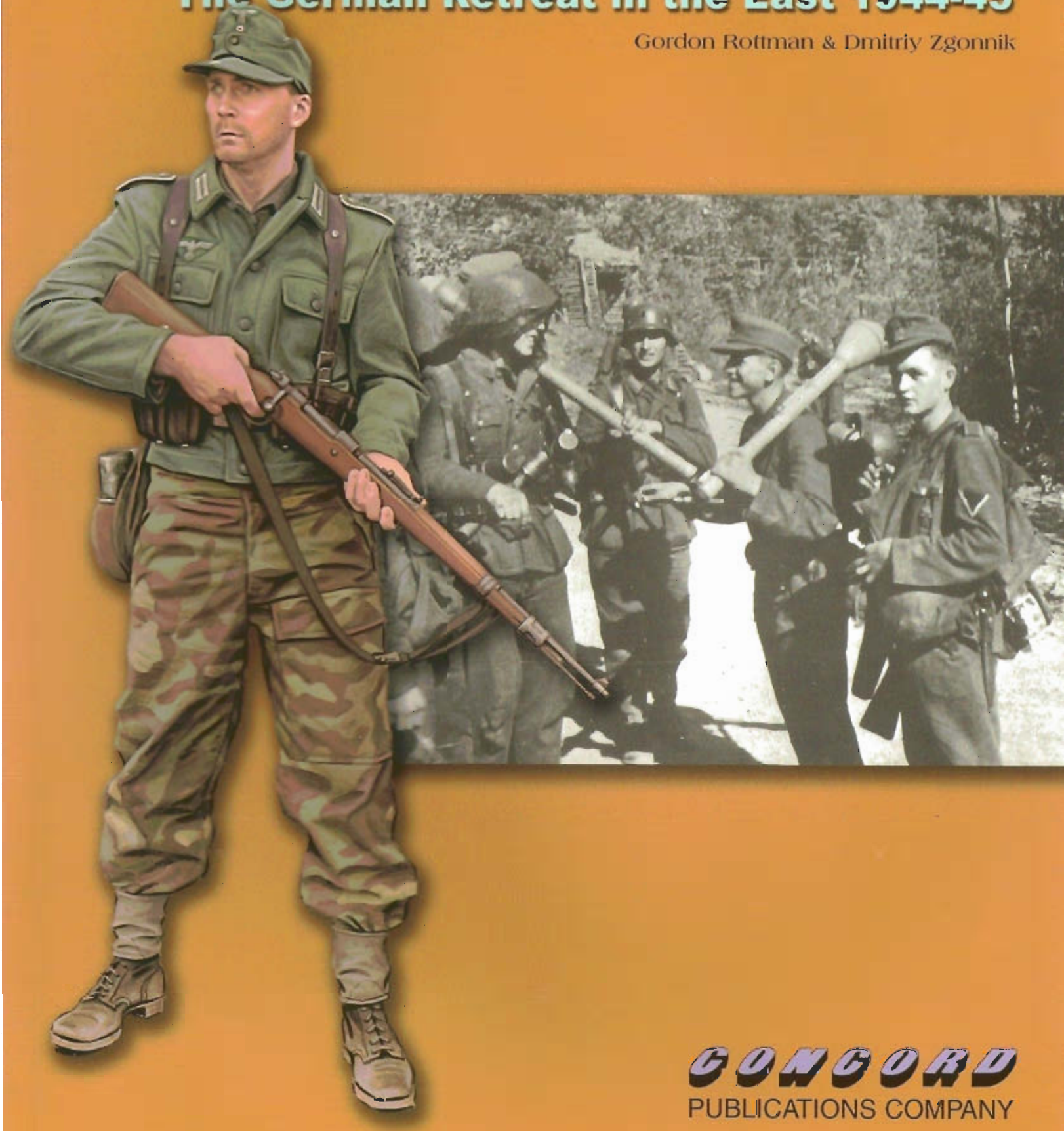
6525

Fighting Withdrawal

The German Retreat in the East 1944-45

Gordon Rottman & Dmitriy Zgonnik



CONCORD
PUBLICATIONS COMPANY

INTRODUCTION

The turning point of the war on the Eastern Front (Ostfront) occurred on 23 November 1942 when Stalingrad was cutoff by the Soviet counteroffensive. Within months it was readily apparent that the Soviet juggernaut was not stopping and continued its offensive through the bitter winter.

The Germans were desperately seeking more effective weapons, some fanciful and impractical, but others did work. The problem was that they could not produce sufficient quantities to replace losses much less replace obsolescent weapons and equipment. There were dreams of super weapons that would reverse the course of the war in the favor of the Reich. Be it V-2 rockets or super tanks, none fulfilled expectations or dreams.

Improved tanks and assault guns rolled off production lines, but not fast enough and the impact of material shortages and increasingly unskilled labor were being felt. Nonetheless, valuable weapons were reaching the hands of the hard-pressed troops. The new 7.9mm MG 42 machine gun with its ripping paper sound of high rate fire were mostly being sent to the Eastern Front. The Panzerfaust series of individual antitank projectors were reaching the front in large numbers. While short-ranged and none too accurate, they gave the individual soldier the capability to knock out a tank. The 7.9mm Stg 44 (formerly the MP 44) assault rifle too was being sent to the Eastern Front. It gave riflemen an unprecedented close-assault automatic weapon. It was only issued to selected units in comparatively small numbers, by no means in quantities to replace bolt-action rifles. In that regard the German Landser and the Soviet frontoviki were equal with both using a rugged, reliable bolt-action rifle with a five-round magazine.

In the brutal climatic conditions with its wide extremes of heat and cold, rain, dust, and mud, the German soldier struggled with often inadequate uniforms and weather protection. A very effective and popular insulated winter suit was issued for the winter of 1942/43 and greatly reduced suffering while improving combat efficiency. Other clothing areas suffered though. Field uniforms, greatcoats, and other wool uniform items were made with increasingly higher percentages of blended rayon. This much reduced their warmth, water-repellency, durability, and appearance. This applied too to knit gloves, sweaters, underclothing, blankets, and more. In late 1944 a war economy uniform of a new, non-traditional design was introduced modeled after the British battledress.

Regardless of new weapons and equipment and their scarcity, what affected the German armed forces the most was simply insufficient manpower. They were faced by a massive Red Army and even though the majority of the Heer and other forces were committed to the Eastern Front, they were being steam-rolled by the massive Red Army of Workers and Peasants backed by seemingly limitless supplies of tanks, artillery, aircraft, munitions, and soldiers.

In order to maximize its limited and basically irreplaceable manpower, the Heer underwent frequent reorganizations in an effort to do more with less and optimize the allocation of its weapons. A study of the evolution of the infantry regiment from 1944 will demonstrate how these efforts attempted to achieve this.

Prior to these reorganizations the Germans were forced to establish an ad hoc reduced-strength organization on the Eastern Front. In late 1943 and early 1944 some divisions were so understrength owing to combat and cold weather casualties, illness, and non-combat casualties that they were unable to perform as divisions. In the past when units were reduced in strength through combat they retained their basic structure and designations, just reduced in size. Divisions were now so understrength that they were no more regimental sized. They were temporally redesignated as Divisionsgruppen (divisional groups) and retained their original number. Three divisional groups were grouped together as Korps-Abteilungen (corps detachments) and designated by letters (A to H). These Korps-Abteilungen were division sized formations and operated as such. In the spring of 1944 these divisional groups were rebuilt as normal divisions.

The Infanterie-Division neuer Art 44-n.A. 44 (Infantry Division New Type 1944) organization tables were issued in March 1944. The grenadier regiment was reduced to only two battalions. This gave the infantry division only seven maneuver battalions instead of nine. This meant that regiments had no reserve battalion. Often all three regiments had to be placed in the frontline and there was no reserve regiment. Divisions were required to defend extended frontages over two times what a full strength division was allotted by doctrine. It is what the Germans called Alles in die Waagschale werfen ("To put everything on the scale pan"). This was a serious shortcoming since divisions were mostly on the defensive. Regiments not only lacked a reserve battalion to block a local breakthrough or counterattack to regain lost ground, but it severally limited the depth of the defense, which was essential to an effective defense. A thin frontline without in-depth positions for the enemy to fight through could be relatively easily to overcome. The seventh maneuver battalion was under division control. This was the

Füsilier-Bataillon; also known as the Divisions-Bataillon (divisional battalion) or Radfahrer-Bataillon (bicycle battalion). This unit replaced the former reconnaissance battalion (Aufklärung-Abteilung). Being on the defensive there was less of a need for reconnaissance. The new battalion was organized along the lines of a grenadier battalion with three rifle companies and a heavy (weapons) company. All or at least parts of the companies were equipped with bicycles to provide a degree of tactical mobility.

Grenadier-Regiment n.A. 44	
Regiments-Stab	
Nachrichtenzug	
Pionierzug	6x light MG
Reiter- oder Radfahrerzug	3x light MG
Grenadier-Bataillon (x2)	
Bataillons-Stab	
Schützen-Kompanie (x3)	16x light MG, 2x 8cm mortar
Maschinengewehr-Kompanie	3x light MG, 12x heavy MG, 4x 8cm mortar
leichte Infanterie Kolonne	
Infanteriegeschütz-Kompanie	5x light MG, 6x 7.5 inf gun, 2x 15cm inf gun
Panzerjäger-Kompanie	13x light MG, 12x 7.5cm AT gun
Regiments Tross	

The rifle companies were designated 1. to 3. in I Bataillon and 5. to 7. in II Bataillon while the machine gun companies of the two battalions were designated 4. and 8., respectively. The infantry gun company was designated 13. Kompanie and the antitank company as 14. to allow a third battalion to be organized (9. to 12. Kompanien). The deletion of the third battalion was considered temporary.

In August 1944 a number of what were designated Volks-Grenadier-Divisionen (people's grenadier divisions) were raised. Its three regiments were more heavily armed than earlier regiments in some categories of weapons, but still had only two battalions. Every effort was made to trim personnel strength. The grenadier companies' two "machine pistol platoons" were to be armed with Stg 44 assault rifles, but this was seldom achieved and most were still armed with bolt-action rifles.

Volks-Grenadier-Regiment, 1944	
Regiments-Stab	
Stabs-Kompanie*	10x light MG
Grenadier-Bataillon (x2)	
Bataillons-Stab	
Versorgungszug	2x light MG
Grenadier-Kompanie (x3)	9x light MG
schwere Kompanie	1x light MG, 8x heavy MG, 6x 7.5cm inf gun,6x 8cm mortar
Infanteriegeschütz-Kompanie	5x light MG, 4x 7.5cm inf gun, 8x 12cm mortar
Panzerzerstörer-Kompanie	4x light MG, 54x Panzerschreck
Regiments Tross	

* With the same types of platoons as assigned to the Grenadier-Regiment n.A. 44 Stab.

The Infanterie-Division 45 likewise had two grenadier regiments and was similar in structure to the Volks-Grenadier-Regiment, but with a reallocation of weapons. It was established in December 1944.

Grenadier-Regiment, 1945	
Regiments-Stab	
Stabs-Kompanie	10x light MG
Grenadier-Bataillon (x2)	
Bataillons-Stab	
Versorgungszug	2x light MG
Grenadier-Kompanie (x3)	9x light MG
schwere Kompanie	1x light MG, 8x heavy MG, 4x 7.5cm inf gun, 6x 8cm mortar
schwerer Kompanie	5x light MG, 2x 15 inf gun, 8x 12cm mortar
Panzerzerstörer-Kompanie	4x light MG, 54x Panzerschreck (+18 in reserve)
Regiments Tross	

The Germans were desperate to raise additional divisions. The Waffen-SS formed second rate divisions from not only Germanic peoples from outside of Greater Germany, but from non-Germans and even those considered racially inferior. The Luftwaffe raised 21 Luftwaffe-Feld-Divisions from 1942 and mainly employed them on the Eastern Front. They were manned by unemployed ground support and service personnel. Three of the Fallschirmjäger-Divisions also fought on the Eastern Front. The War Navy too made a modest contribution in the form of three infantry divisions.

Every available manpower source was tapped including the Police, National Labor Service, National Socialist Motor Corps, Assault Detachments (SA Brown Shirts), Hitler Youth, and party organizations. Hitler had every intention of bringing down the Third Reich with him and leaving nothing but a wasteland of destruction. In the final dying days of the Third Reich the ultimate last ditch militia was raised from the too young and too old, the Volkssturm (People's Assault).

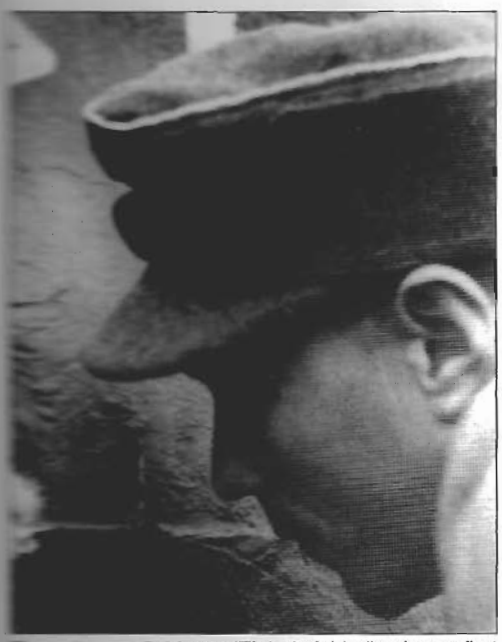
A squad leader scans the rubbled village before him for any signs of enemy movement. Empty cartridges cases litter the ground. Glints of sunlight on cartridges could reveal a position.

A local security patrol clad in the insulated winter suit with the white side out. The reverse gray side can be seen in the hoods. Some uniforms had three-color camouflage pattern rather than the gray.

Infantrymen wearing two-piece insulated winter uniforms, white or gray side out, snow suits, greatcoats, and whitewashed helmets make their way back to a new position. Uniformity was of little concern. They drag a small pulk, a small boat-like sled piled with equipment. Pulk is often attributed as being Russian for sled, but it is a Finnish word.

A patrol prepares to move out for an overnight mission, which is why they are carrying blankets. In the brutal winter the troops would go for weeks without removing their insulated suits. There were no opportunities to wash them and the white side soon became so filthy that it negated any camouflage value.

These infantrymen appear to have barely escaped from a Russian log cabin known as an Isba, a barrowed Russian word. Accidental fires were a common occurrence, but they were able to retrieve most of the equipment to include a pair of snow skies. Lost of equipment, even minor personal gear, was a serious matter as replacements were scarce and a long time coming.



The universal field cap (Einheitsfeldmütze) was first issued in 1943. This officer's version bears 2mm silver-colored crown piping. The cap's design incorporated folding side flaps that could be buttoned under the chin to protect the ears, sides of the head, and nape of the neck in cold weather. On the front of the crown were the embroidered national eagle and cockade. Standard issue was field gray, but Panzer troops received a black version and there were also some made of camouflage fabric.

Infantrymen wearing the insulated winter suit with the gray side out, assemble outside the village af their accident.

An infantry patrol follows an old trench line. It was dug in a good position along a naturally camouflaging windbreak edging a cornfield. The second man fr the rear carries the first version of the Panzerfaust, the Panzerfaust 30 klein (small) along with his carbine. It has a much smaller in diameter warhead th the later improved models. Black and red button-on arm stripes were issued with the insulated winter uniform to wear as friend-or-foe identification. The colo combinations, and on which arms the stripes were worn were changed daily. One or the other or combinations of the two colors could be worn including t exclusion of a stripe from one arm provided for eight different alternatives.

An MP40 machine pistol-armed infantryman checks the enemy dead in an overrun strongpoint. The scattered dirt clods indicate the position had been shelled. The trenches were dug after the last snowfall and are impossible to provide any degree of concealment.

Through the latter part of 1943 divisional bicyclist and reconnaissance battalions were reorganized and redesignated Divisions Füsilier-Bataillonen. They now served as a mobile reserve with reconnaissance being a secondary mission. Most were equipped with bicycles to provide a surprising degree of tactical mobility and heavily armed. These Füsiliere each have two Panzerfaust 60 antitank projectors fitted on their troop bicycles (Truppenfahrrad 38). The bicycles were painted field gray (dark green) or black and the Panzerfausten dark yellow (tan). They are also armed with 7.9mm StG 44 assault rifles.

Infantrymen move down a muddy road passing a lightly camouflaged Soviet 45mm M1937 antitank gun. The Germans used these as the 4.5cm Pak 184/1(r). Such apparently sparse camouflage may have appeared to provide little concealment, but it was enough to breakup its shape and hide it from quick detection by a tank giving the antitank gun the opportunity to get off the first critical round.

A rifle company command post on the frontline. Such command posts were usually right on the frontline so that the commander had the closest possible contact with his platoons. There were no radio communications between the command post and the platoons. Communications was accomplished by verbal orders, arm and hand signals, and when these were impractical, by runners. The Torn. Fu. backpack radio is for contact with the battalion command post. It could not be operated on the move as the large antenna had to be erected. Note to the left of the company commander's (Kompaniechef) left elbow is a 3-kilogram magnetic hand-mine, a shaped-charge used to attack tanks.

Mountain infantrymen (Gebirgsjäger) question a Russian woman and examine her papers. Soviet partisan activity was intense in rural areas and towns. No one could be trusted. The soldier to the left carries the standard 7.9mm Kar98k carbine while the man to the right has a 7.9mm Gew 43 semi-automatic rifle. The Gew 43 (also called a Kar 43) was issued on the basis of one per squad in some units. Being semi-automatic and having a 10-round magazine, one such rifle did not significantly add to the squad's firepower.

Grenadiers with little cover available move into an assault position. They carry all of the usual individual equipment: rolled Zeltbahn shelter-quarter, bread bag, water bottle with drinking cup, mess kit, gasmask carrier, entrenching tool, and bayonet.

Two grenadiers take an opportunity to eat their meager field rations; one man remains alert and on guard while his comrade eats. The straw, being spread on the inside of the parapet, is not for camouflage, but to provide insulation from the chilled ground.

A telephone relay post on the frontline. With equipment scarcity often items such as field switchboards were unavailable so separate circuits had to be established for the company command post to talk to its platoons and the battalion headquarters, which would have to relay messages from adjacent companies. Signals soldier (Nachrichtensoldaten) were known as Strippenzieher (line-puller).

Infantrymen consolidate on their objective, a hard fought over Soviet position woe during a counterattack. Several damaged weapons are scattered about. Even though the Germans were in gradual retreat, local counterattacks, soiling attacks, and divisionary attacks were still conducted in effort to stabilize the frontline, regain terrain favorable for the defense, or simply to throw the enemy off balance.

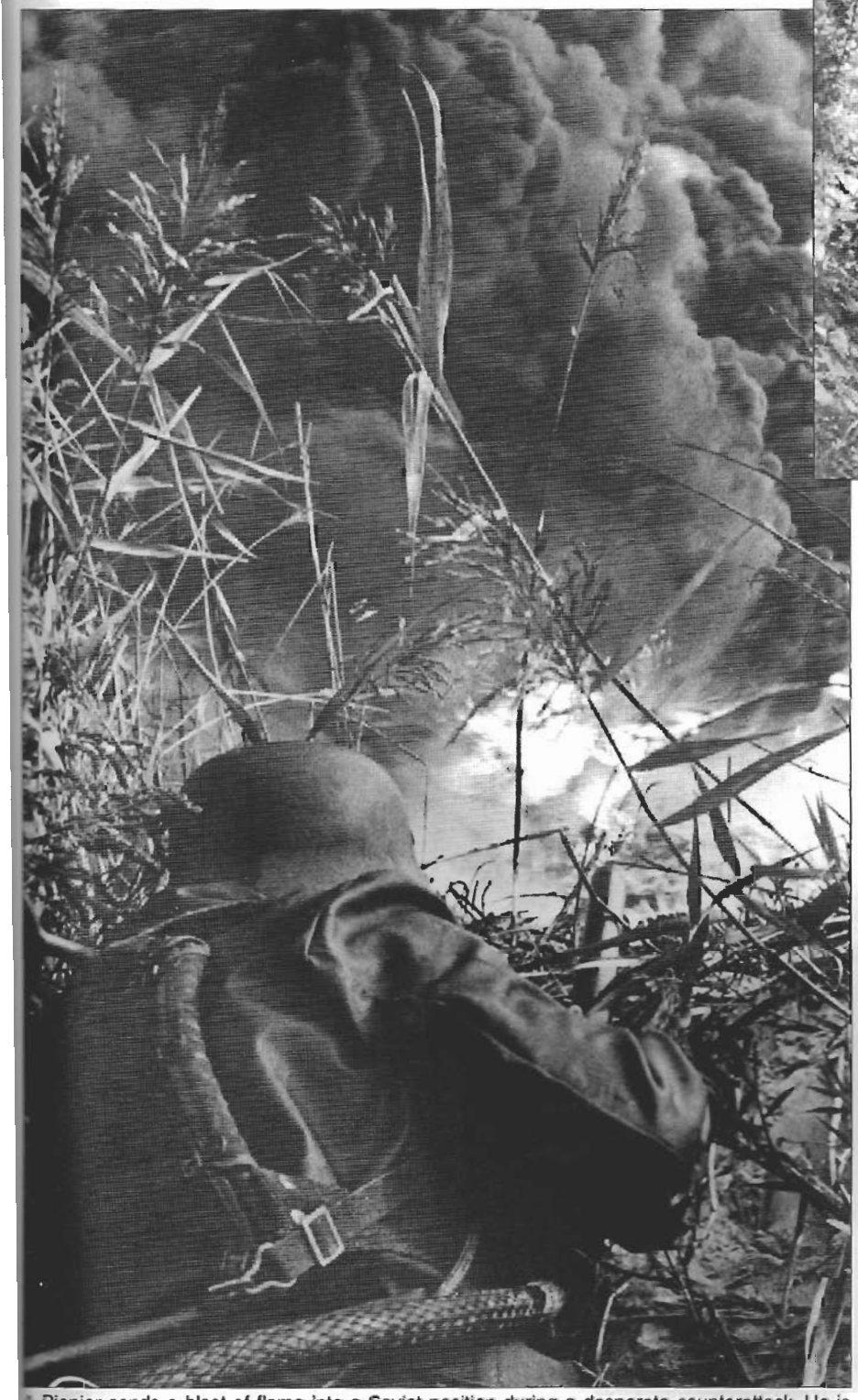
Two infantrymen write home, no doubt announcing they were just awarded the Iron Cross 2nd Class. The cross and ribbon is worn through the second buttonhole of the tunic front closure. This was only done on the day the decoration was awarded. After that day only the ribbon would be worn through the buttonhole. The Gefreiter to the right displays the Nachrichtenpersonalabzeichen (Signals Personnel Badge) above his chevron. The lightening bolt would be embroidered in the unit's branch color (Waffenfarbe), in this instance, white for infantry, the same as the piping on their shoulder straps.

As in all armies the rifle squad (Schützen-Gruppe) was the basic tactical unit, three of which were assigned to a rifle platoon (Schützen-Zug). A full squad consisted of 10 men, but it was not uncommon for them to consist of only five to eight. Each squad possessed a light machine gun as the core of its firepower. Here the squad leader (Gruppenführer), a corporal (Unteroffizier), leads his men through a shrapnel-pocked town.

A rifle squad's machine troop was comprised of three men, the 1. Maschinengewehr-Schütze-the gunner known as the Abzug ("trigger" as in triggerman), here a Gefreiter, the 2. Maschinengewehr-Schütze-the assistant gunner known as the Zwo (a corruption of Zwei-two), and the 3. Maschinengewehr-Schütze-or Munitions-Schütze, the ammunition bearer. This Abzug carries a 7.9mm MG42 light machine gun.

Two Unteroffizier squad leaders check the azimuth (direction) of the march route on a compass (Marschkompass). Both are armed with 9mm MP40 machine pistols. Both carry 7x30 universal binoculars (Einheits-Doppelfernrohr), as much as a sign of office as the 9mm silver-gray collar braid worn by all NCOs. The colored loop on the rifleman's shoulder strap indicates his battalion, a practice seeing limited use from January 1943: I Bataillon-white, II- bright red, III- gold yellow, and IV- dark blue.

Troops of a rifle battalion's machine gun company await orders to advance. The nearest man carries a 300-round ammunition box while the further man carries the folded machine gun tripod.



A Pionier sends a blast of flame into a Soviet position during a desperate counterattack. He is using a Flammenwerfer 35 with a large cylindrical tank, which is mostly off-camera. He wears the special treated leather protective suit issued to flamethrower operators. Flamethrowers were also used to set buildings, other structures, and abandoned supplies alight when withdrawing.

A light machine gun troop fires on an enemy position taking mortar fire. The German soldier bestowed the machine gun with a number of colorful nicknames: Dünnschißkanone (diarrhoea cannon), Gartenspritzer (garden sprinkler), Hitlergeige (Hitler violin), Kaffeemühle (coffee grinder), and Schnatterpuste (chatter breath) to name a few.

Troops are carrying heavy supply crates to forward positions. With their expressions of urgency and the spread out interval they appear to be exposed to sniper fire. A short pole has been fastened to each crate and the pole used as a level to heft the crate on the back. This was uncomfortable as the pole dug into the shoulder.

A soldier surveys a shell-battered strongpoint on the outskirts of a fortified German city. Such defended cities were declared a "fortress" (Festung) by Hitler.

An MG42 machine gun troop covers approaches through a railroad yard. More MG42s were produced when production began in early 1943 to when it ended in April 1945 than all the MG34s produced between 1936 and 1945, the latter's production run. Most MG42s were sent to the Eastern Front.

This Oberfeldwebel wears the Kradmantel, contraction for Schutzmantel für Kraftradfahrer (protective suit for motorcyclists), a one-piece, gray-green rubberized waterproof and windproof suit. Over-boots and glove covers of the same material were provided. This is a combination motorcycle with a sidecar.

An officer and an NCO of a motorcycle rifle battalion (Kradschützen-Bataillon) discuss grenade throwing techniques with the Stg 24 stick hand grenade (Stielhandgranate 24). Both wear the Kradmantel protective suit. The NCO is fortunate to possess two MP40 machine pistol magazine pouches. Shortages often allowed only one of the three-pocket pouches to be issued to machine pistol-armed men.

Motorcycle rifle troops rest at an abandoned airfield before moving on. The hangar is a portable Luftwaffe model with a breakdown frame and canvas cover.

An MG42-armed machine gunner stands ready to move out with his unit. He wears a Zeltbahn shelter-quarter configured in the marching manner. The packet on his chest contains a gas protective sheet (Gasplane). The MG42 could hammer out 1,100-1,200 rounds per minute while an MG34 fired 800-900 rounds per minute. Most Soviet machine guns fired 500-600 rounds per minute.

A Gefreiter inspects the warhead of a Panzerfaust 60. The flexible sheet metal fins folded around the tailboom to allow the warhead to be inserted into the 44mm launcher tube. Even though the warhead could be removed to insert the detonator before firing, it was not considered a re-loadable weapon. It was fired and the launch tube discarded. The shaped-charge warhead could penetrate about 200mm (8 inches) of armor. The designation of the Panzerfaust 30, 60, and 100 indicated their approximate effective range in meters.

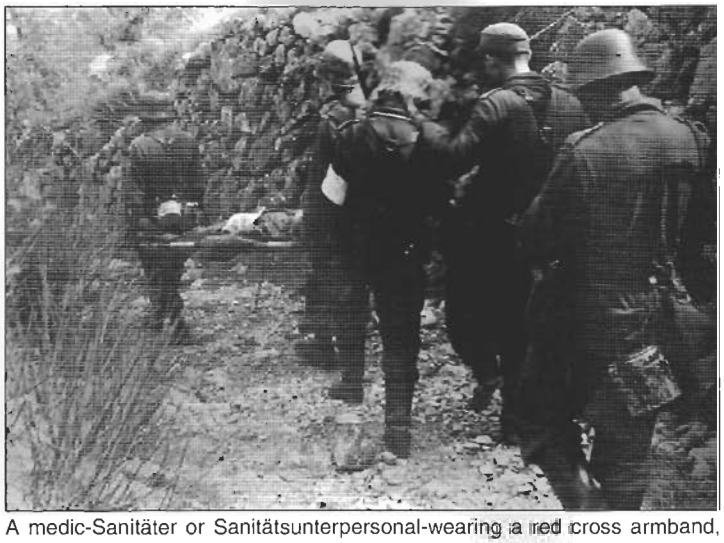
A soldier chats with an officer as he returns from a water detail for his squad.

Scanned by
Igor_K
for free Internet society

A Grenadier carries a Kumpel (buddy or pal), wounded in the foot, to the rear. He has a medical tag attached to his collar describing his wounds. A carbine was said to be a Soldatenbraut (soldier's bride); it would never leave his side.

A pair of Panzerfaust 30 antitank projectors are carried at the ready in a light field car. Firing instructions and a back blast warning was stenciled in black on the sides of the dark yellow launcher tubes. Sometimes instructions were printed on a black on white paper label, which was pasted to the lower portion of the warhead body.

A serious foot wound was sometimes enough to get one sent home for convalescence, what was known as a "home wound" (Heimatschuss). A flesh wound was known simply as an Aufriss (split).



A medic-Sanitäter or Sanitätsunterpersonal-wearing a red cross armband, follows behind litter bearers. He assists a slightly wounded solider.

This wreaked Panzer hulk serves as a hasty fighting position. Caution had to be used when occupying a position adjacent to a vehicle hulk as it was easy for an observer to direct a machine gunner to engage the target, for example, "Left side of the burned out T-IV." (The Soviets referred to German tanks as T-III, T-IV, etc in a manner similar to the British and US practice of calling them a Mk III or Mk IV.)

This well dug-in 8cm mGrW 34 mortar crew has erected a portable camouflage screen made of bundled straw to screen their activity, smoke, and dust from enemy observers. There was a platoon of four 8cm mortars assigned to a grenadier battalion's machine gun company. The mortar was actually 81mm and could not fire Soviet 82mm mortar rounds, but the Soviets could fire German ammunition. The Germans on their part often used the many captured Soviet mortars and fired their own ammunition from them using German firing tables.

A Leutnant, wounded and refusing evacuation, shouts orders during a desperate rear guard action. Such missions were referred to as a Himmelfahrtskommando (Ascension Day Commando)-a "journey to heaven mission" or as a Selbstmörderkolonne (suicide column).

Rear guard troops move out from a German town. That they had experienced hard combat is evident. To the right one soldier assists a wounded comrade.

Rear guard troops pullback from a village they had fired before withdrawing. This was a dangerous time for rearguards. As soon as the Soviets realized the defenders were withdrawing they would immediately assault or envelop the town to cutoff the retreat or shell the withdrawal routes behind the village or conduct a combination of these actions.

Using smoke candles to screen their withdrawal, infantrymen rapidly vacate a rear guard position. In some instances dry grass and brush was set on fire to cover troops movements and to hamper the enemy infantry's advance.

Snipers, or simply selected riflemen without benefit of telescopic sights, were left behind to delay the advancing enemy. This marksman appears to have settled in for a long stay, perhaps infinitely.

Ideal patrolling weather as the winter turned into spring. Fog-shrouded forests concealed the movements of the patrol and dampened any noise they might make. It was cool enough to be comfortable for a moving man, but for a bored static sentry it was cold, wet, confining, and generally miserable to sit still in for seemingly endless hours.

Literally half of this Polish cabin has been salvaged for materials to build bunkers. The roof of this small two-man bunker is about 1.7 meters thick with layers of crisscrossed logs and earth demonstrating a healthy respect for Soviet artillery.

A less than desirable defensive position dug-in on the edge of a marsh. It does provide a good field of fire, however, across the foggy field. Note that the MG42 machine gun's bipod is fitted in the "defensive" position midway down the barrel jacket rather than in the normal position just behind the muzzle. This allowed it to be fired more easily from behind a parapet.

Grenadiers, who successfully knocked out a T-34 tank with Panzerfausten 30 and 30 kline watch a nearby air action with enthusiasm.

A 8cm mGrW 34 mortar troops fires off a rapid barrage of shells. The gunner to the left stabilizes the bipod as the loader prepares to drop a maroon-painted round down the tube. The ammunition number verifies the proper number of ring-like propellant charges are fitted to the tailboom for the intended range. An interesting fact is that among World War II soldiers on all sides they typically had the opinion that their own mortars were of limited effectiveness, but greatly respected the enemy's. It appears to be a matter of perception depending upon which end one is located. This impression is made all the more interesting in that just about every belligerent country used mortars of almost the same design and capabilities being 81mm or 82mm in caliber of the same Stokes/Brandt design developed by the British and improved upon by the French.

A defensive position dug within a shell-battered village. The rubble supplied endless building materials and the litter made it easy to conceal fighting positions and firing ports.

Infantrymen trudge westward toward the Fatherland as the smoke of a burning village they left behind drifts across their path.

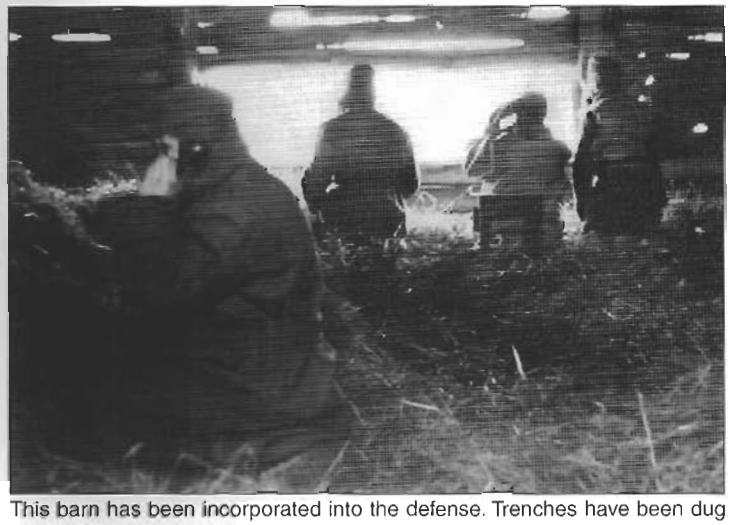
Grenadiers assemble to proceed to a road where they will establish an antitank roadblock. They are armed with Panzerfaust 30 antitank projectors. The Panzerfaust was not a rocket launcher like the Panzerschreck or the American bazooka. It was a recoilless projector. Some of the men wear mosquito nets pulled up over their helmets. Flies and mosquitoes were major nuisances on the Eastern Front.

Awaiting the order to move out for a counterattack. Devastating Soviet artillery could rain down on assembly areas at anytime. Trenches were essential to survival.

The wear and tear of the winter season's fighting is demonstrated on this tattered insulted suit. There was simply nothing to replace it with. The troops had no opportunity to wash their clothes or themselves for months on end.

A Grenadier rushes through a shell-blasted strongpoint. In the background are Spanish riders (spanischer Reiter) barbed wire obstacles, also known as knife-rests or cheval de frie.

An Unteroffizier and a gunner peer from an MG34 machine gun embrasure. The leather tab attached to the binoculars allows it to be buttoned to a tunic front closure button to prevent it from swinging and bouncing when running. The oval-shaped leather cap beside the Unterofizier's cheek is an eyepiece protector fastened to the binoculars' neck strap.

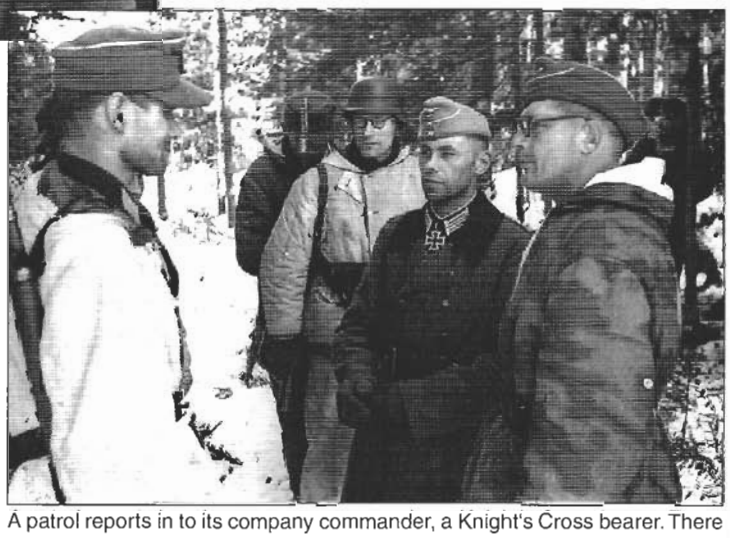


This barn has been incorporated into the defense. Trenches have been dug into its floor and firing embrasures cut, typically smaller than this example so as not to be so conspicuous. The defenses of a village would not all be constructed inside buildings. They drew artillery fire. Many German units avoided the buildings altogether except for shelter. The actual defensive positions would be dug well outside the village.

Infantrymen relax in the entry trench to their half-squad bunker (Halbgruppenunterstand) for some fresh air. Such bunkers were airless, damp, musty, and smelled of sweat, urine, gun oil, and stale food. Wet wool uniforms contributed their own strong odor. Note the expedient camouflage straps on their helmets made from greatcoat securing straps taken from their backpacks.

Often in retreat and on the move for weeks at a time, there was no time for the lengthy process of melting snow and heating it to allow shaving. It requires a surprisingly large amount of snow to collect a liter of water. The soldier to the right has an egg hand grenade (Eihandgranaten 39-Eihgr 39) carried on his cartridge pouch's securing strap by a suspension ring on the grenade's bottom.

A rifle company in formation standing at ease (the left foot slightly forward and to the moved out left of the right foot, arms hang loosely to the sides). They wear the 1938 field cap (Feldmütze 38) generally known as the Schiffchenmütze (little boat cap) or Schiffchen or Krätzchen (little scratch). In rear areas officers often wore the insulated suit jacket's top button opened to display their more elaborate collar bars to identify them as an officer. Of course at the front they undertook efforts to appear no different than enlisted men.



A patrol reports in to its company commander, a Knight's Cross bearer. There were officers, who sought the Knight's Cross, often at the expense of others and were referred to as an officer with a Halsschmerzen (sore-throat). The winter insulated suit was often worn as appropriate for the terrain and vegetation. Even with snow on the ground it was common for troops operating in forests to wear the green and brown camouflage pattern-side out, especially if the enemy was some distance off. It was also practical in forests for the jacket to be worn camouflage-side out and the trousers with the white-side out. For a walking man this allowed the green and browns of the jacket to blend into the evergreen vegetation and the white trousers to blend into the snow-covered ground.

Waffen-Sturmmann, 14.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (galizisch Nr. 1), 1944

14.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (galizisch Nr. 1) was manned by German-speaking Volksdeutschen from Galicia, which had been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and had been divided up between Poland and the Ukraine. A Sturmmann was equivalent to a Heer Gefreiter and would normally wear a single chevron on the left upper sleeve. This was seldom worn on camouflage uniforms though. This grenadier is armed with a 7.9mm StG 44 assault rifle and carries two three-pocket pouches holding 30-round magazines. There was no standard allocation for these weapons. Some units received one per squad while others may have been issued enough to arm half or more of the squads. The camouflage jacket (Tarnjacke) and helmet cover are in the predominately green summer pattern. The Waffen-SS began issuing camouflage smocks in 1939 and had been issuing helmet covers, shelter-quarters, and face masks since the year before. The smocks were popular not only for their camouflage value, they were water-repellent.

SS-Hauptscharführer, 16.SS-Panzergrenadier-Division "Reichsführer SS", 1944

Equivalent to a Heeres Oberfeldwebel, this NCO is a Zugführer (platoon leader). Officers were in very short supply and few if any platoons within a company were commanded by officers. He is armed with a 9mm MP40 machine pistol, normally issued only to squad and platoon leaders, plus a Panzerfaust 60. Each of the ammunition pouches holds three 32-round magazines. The 6x20 universal binoculars, like the Panzerfaust, is painted dark yellow. This tan color was introduced in February 1943 to replace field gray (dark green) in order to conserve green paint pigment. He wears an insulated reversible winter jacket, which was of a different design that the Heer winter suit. This is the autumn pattern with browns and tans predominating; the reverse is white. In less cold weather, especially if marching, the matching insulated trousers were often removed. Rather than all-leather marching boots he is fortunate to possess winter boots with thick felt uppers and the lower leather portion lined with felt.

SS-Grenadier, 3.SS-Panzer-Division "Totenkopf", 1945

This grenadier, or rifleman, is outfitted in the Waffen-SS two-piece, insulated, reversible winter suit, which is made of higher quality materials than its Heer counterpart. He is armed with a 7.9mm Kar 98k carbine. This Mauser was the standard shoulder arm for the Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS. Some 11.5 million Kar 98k carbines were made making it the most produced of all Mauser models. They were made in eight different factories with production beginning in 1935. Quality was not really compromised when the "war model" (Kriegsmodell) was introduced in 1942 using stampings for some minor parts. Crude finishing, production shortcuts, and poor quality wooden stocks appeared in 1944 though. The German soldier referred to the Kar 98k variously as a Gewehr (rifle) even though it was technically a carbine, the Mauserbüchse (Büchse was an old term for a firearm), Mauserkarabiner (Mauser carbine), Flinte (shotgun), or Knarre (colloquialism for gun). A Stg 24 stick hand grenade is carried in his belt.

SS-Grenadier, 9.SS-Panzer-Division "Hohenstaufen", 1945

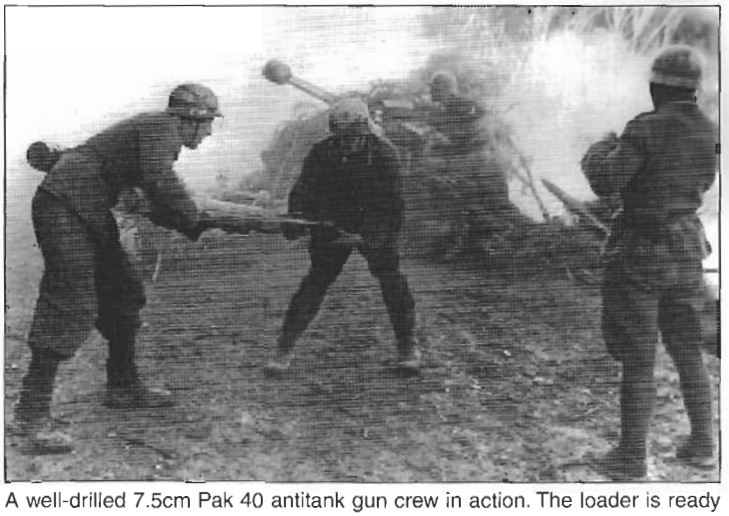
In September 1944, the war economy Feldbluse and Feldhose were introduced. It was a departure from the traditional German uniform pattern and was influenced by the British battledress. Its color was a grayish-green rather than the darker green field gray. Its design was maximized to conserve materials and speed production by inexperienced laborers. Only limited numbers of these uniforms were issued. While this blouse bears field gray buttons, they were also issued with dark gray buttons. The national eagle on the right breast too was of an economy design embroidered on a triangular backing. Even with all the economy measures, Waffenfarbe arm of service colored piping was retained on rank shoulder straps. His trousers here are made from three-color Italian camouflage fabric. The Germans produced complete sets of uniforms from such fabric beginning in 1943. He also wears the 1943 universal field cap; helmets were in short supply by this stage of the war. He is armed with the standard Kar 98k carbine.

Panzerabwehrtruppen manhandle a gun to move it to a forward position. They have web hauling straps around their torsos, which are clipped to towropes. Russian houses and barns were valuable for shelter from the brutal weather, but most were lice-infested resulting in invasion by Kleiderpartisanen (clothes partisans).

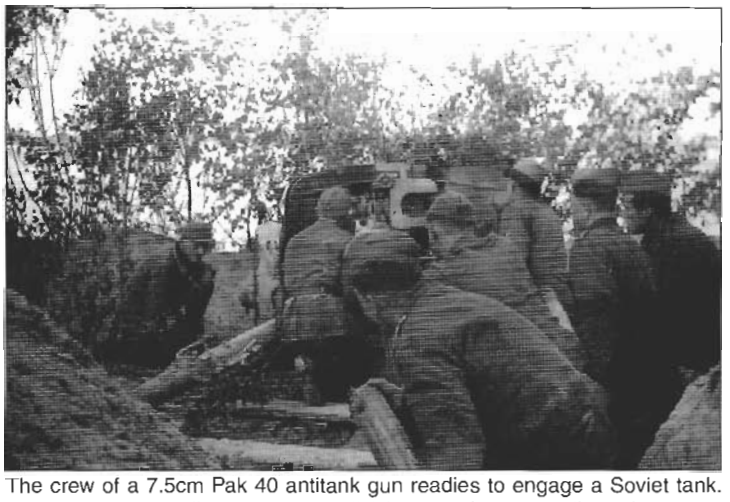
The crew of a 3.7cm Pak 35/36 antitank gun manhandle their "doorknocker" (Türklopfer), a nickname bestowed to the obsolete weapon owing to it poor performance against Soviet T-34 and KV-series tanks.

An officer, identifiable by the silver-colored crown piping on his universal field cap, quickly write a note to be carried to a subunit by a runner. The cap is the black Panzertruppen version. As Panzer units lost their tanks the surviving crews continued to fight as infantry. He carries either a 7.65mm or 9mm kruz (a shorter cartridge than the 9mm used in machine pistols and P08 and P38 pistols). A wide variety of pistol models in these calibers was issued as substitutes and came from almost every occupied country.

This crew of a 5cm Pak 38 conducts crew drills in a bivouac area. Speed and efficiency were essential to survival. Note the small brackets fitted on the shield and the wire lacing. This is for attaching foliage.



A well-drilled 7.5cm Pak 40 antitank gun crew in action. The loader is ready to jam in a round. The two men to the left demonstrate the practice of swinging the metal cartridge container forward and stopping it with a jerk to allow the heavy round to slide out in the waiting ammunition handler's hands.



The crew of a 7.5cm Pak 40 antitank gun readies to engage a Soviet tank. These were normally assigned to divisional antitank battalions, but some were often assigned to grenadier regiment antitank companies to augment 5cm Pak 38 antitank guns. The two belt support hooks are seen on the back of some of the crewmen. These were removable for laundering the tunic.

Pioneer troops (Pionieretruppen) using hand tools hastily improve a one-lane road along a lake shore. The top of the embankment would have made a better roadbed, but this one protected traffic from observation and fire.

Panzergrenadiere dismount from a Pz.Kpfw. V Panther tank on which they hitched a ride. The machine gunner to the left carries an MG42. Panzergrenadiere wore grass green Waffenfarbe piping.

Panzergreandier troops watch an approaching aircraft with apprehension from a straw-camouflage trench. The man in the foreground is a machine gunner, his gun is to the left. He wear the standard machine gun replacement parts container on his left front.
Uncharacteristically he also wears a three-pocket carbine cartridge pouch on his right front-machine gunners were normally armed with pistols. He mainly uses the pouch for small personal items. In the background is an Sd.Kfz. 251/1 Schützenpanzerwagen.

These Panzergrenadiere hold back as a tank advances across open ground. They often remained well clear of tanks as they drew antitank gun, antitank rifle, machine gun, mortar, and artillery fire. They would position themselves though where they could protect the Panzer from close-in infantry attacks with their rifle and machine gun fire.

Panzer troops were known for their unique black uniforms, but they were also issued standard field gray field uniforms. With the loss of so many tanks many tankers simply continued to fight on with their Panzer units now serving as infantry. They either donned their field gray uniforms if available or were issued them or simply continued to wear their back uniforms with the addition of infantry equipment as here.

Panzergrenadiere ride to the front aboard an imposing 8.8cm gun-armed Pz.Kpfw. VI Tiger I tank. 1,355 of these massive tanks were built between 1942 and 1945. Regardless of its heavy armor spare track sections have been secured to the hull for additional protection.

A 7.5cm gun-armed Pz.Kpfw. V Panther moves to a frontline position with infantrymen taking advantage of the transportation. Vegetation was routinely attached to tanks to conceal them from both ground and air observation. It had become increasingly dangerous for armored vehicles to move in daylight. Enemy tank killers ruled the sky.

A pair of Pz.Kpfw. V Panther heavy tanks roll to the front bearing Panzergrenadiere. The tanks have been coated with Zimmerit "anti-magnetic plaster" in order to hamper the attachment of hand-delivered shaped-charge magnetic mines. The Germans widely employed such mines, and Zimmerit was developed in late 1943 in anticipation that the Soviets would use similar hand-mines. The Red Army never did field such a weapon, but used large numbers of captured German hand-mines. Zimmerit was ordered discontinued in September 1944 because it was rumored gunfire could set it afire. This was soon found to be untrue and it was not removed from vehicles it was already applied to. Its application was not renewed though.

A Pz.Kpfw. VI King Tiger tank passes a column of Panzergrenadiere. Of a Panzergrenadier regiment's two battalions, only one was equipped with Sd.Kfz. 251/1 halftracks, if they were fortunate, and the other with light trucks. In the last months of the war they often fought on foot no differently than standard infantrymen. Note the small horse-drawn infantry carts near the right edge of the photograph. Many of these troops are armed with 7.9mm StG 44 assault rifles, previously known as the MP44 machine pistol.

Artillery

The Germans used large numbers of captured weapons to either replace their losses or simply to increase their firepower with additional weapons. Some Soviet weapons were so widely used by the Wehrmacht that they virtually became standard arms. One of these was the 76.2mm M1939 gun used by the Soviets as a divisional artillery piece. The Germans designated it the 7.62cm FK 297(r) or FK 39(r) field cannon, depending on the variant, or if modified as an antitank gun, the 7.62cm Pak 39(r). The planks in the gun position's bottom were to provide a level base, which improved accuracy.

A 10.5cm leFH.18 light field howitzer has broken through the ice over a roadside ditch. The crew uses a log to lever the gun back on to solid ground. This was the standard divisional artillery piece of which an artillery regiment possessed three battalions, each with three four-gun batteries. Note the one soldier wears the Obergefreiter with over six years service (two chevrons with a star (pip). This was a rare rank by this stage of the war as most had been long promoted to Unteroffizier.

A gun layer (Richtkanonier) sights through an M32 panoramic telescopic sight. Variants of this sight were found on many German artillery pieces. This provides an excellent comparison between two types of Heer camouflage fabric patterns. The rare helmet cover is of the more common "splinter pattern" while the winter insulated suit jacket is of the "water pattern" giving a bleed together appearance of the three colors. Note the cloth loops on the helmet cover for attaching foliage.

An artillery forward observer. The German artillery fire control system was not as rapid as that of the Americans or British, but was about equal to or often better than the Soviet, especially since the Germans made much wider use of radios.

A forward observer's position just behind the frontline. Each battery commander served as the forward observer for his battery. Other battery officers and NCOs could relieve him though. Field telephones were relied on for communications, but in fast moving situations backpack radios were also used. The infantry and the artillery used the same types of radios, but the specific models they used had different frequency coverage.

An artillery observer wisely avoids the better, though more conspicuous, vantage point. He would relay adjustments to a telephone operator below him.

The message center for a 10.5cm howitzer battery. It was connected to the battery commander who was located well forward in an observation post directing fire and to the battalion. The telephone operator uses a Feldfernsprecher 33 field telephone. The small dugout's entrance is protected by shelter-quarters from the rain, and night chill as well as allows the use of lights at night.

Officers of what is generally known as the Hermann Göring Korps attend a demonstration of a camouflage smock and matching helmet camouflage paint. The corps' official designation was Fallschirm-Panzerkorps Hermann Göring (Parachute Armor Corps), which of course did not have a single parachute-qualified soldier. "Fallschirm" had become an honorific, elitist title as had "Grenadier." The Corps was assigned two divisions, Fallschirm-Panzer-Division Hermann Göring and Fallschirm-Panzergrenadier-Division Hermann Göring.

Fallschirm-Panzerkorps Hermann Göring commanders and staff officers confer beside an assault gun.

The same Hermann Göring officers observe a smoke screening demonstration. The Germans used a number of hand-delivered smoke screening devices including stick hand grenade, egg-shaped hand grenades, glass hand grenades, smoke candles, and smoke pots as well as smoke dischargers mounted on tanks and assault guns. Smoke helped blind enemy gunners and concealed German maneuvers or was used to create diversions and deceptions.

An assault gun unit of Panzerkorps Hermann Göring undergoes a readiness inspection. In the center is a general officer, identifiable by his white double trousers stripes. His Heer counterpart wore similar red stripes while Waffen-SS generals wore no such adornment.

Panzerkorps Hermann Göring troops of an assault gun unit pause for a few moments to remember fallen comrades. Note the camouflage pattern painted on many of the helmets. This is probably a dark yellow (tan) on the basic field gray.

Panzerkorps Hermann Göring officers wearing blue-gray service uniforms and a variety of coats including the standard blue-gray wool greatcoat, bluish-gray leather greatcoat, blue-gray motorcycle protective suit (with the large flap across the back), and a privately made smock of Zeltbahn shelter-quarter three-color camouflage fabric. The officer to the right carries a 7.65mm (.32-caliber) pistol in the brown holster - most holsters were black.

On a chilly day a group of Hermann Göring unit commanders and staff officers receive their orders with the backdrop of a 7.5cm Sturmgeschütze III. Three wear blue-gray leather greatcoats, which were privately purchased. Others wear camouflage smocks. The briefing officer with his back to the camera has a small pistol holster on the back of his belt, a common carrying position. Staff and senior officers usually preferred small caliber, 7.65mm (.32-caliber) or 9mm kruz (.380-caliber), pistols over the larger 9mm Walter or Luger. The small pistols were a status symbol of their higher position. These typically might be the Walther PP or PPK, Mauser HSc or Modell 34, Sauer Modell 30, or any of dozens of other makes that were captured or impounded during the conquest of Europe.

Panzerkorps Hermann Göring grenadiers listen to their company commander talking to them from the engine deck of an assault gun. They have grounded their individual belt equipment, but they have kept their weapons and gasmask containers with them.

The early Luftwaffen Feld-Divisionen were no more than brigade sized with four battalions. From late 1942 they were organized similar to Heer infantry divisions with two rifle regiments. Most served on the Eastern Front and did not always give a good accounting for themselves. Many Heer officers and NCOs were assigned to them to improve their training and tactical proficiency. These riflemen wear the blue-gray Luftwaffen flyer's blouse and trousers. This offered poor camouflage. The crate inset in the side of the trench contains five-round loading clips for their carbines.

The 1., 2., and 9. Fallschirmjäger-Divisionen fought on the Eastern Front with the latter performing all its service there. These paratroopers operate an unidentified light field piece of non-German origin.

This Fallschirmjäger MG42 heavy machine gun crew has mounted their gun on its tripod, but note that the long legs are folded upward to allow the gun to be mounted lower to the ground.

Two Fallschirmjäger scouts cautiously work their way past a burned out tank hulk, possibly an old Czechoslovak-made Pz.Kpfw. 38(t) used by the Germans. They are armed with 9mm MP40 machine pistols, what soldiers called a "bullet-squirter" (Kugelspritz). Often called a "Schmeisser," this is incorrect as Hugo Schmeisser did not design the weapons nor had a role in their development. He worked for a different firm than the one developing the MP38 and MP40.

A Luftwaffe-manned 2cm Flak 30 light antiaircraft gun mounted in a well constructed timber reinforced position. In frontline areas the guns were mounted to allow them to be employed against both aerial and ground targets. Its shields have been removed. Beneath the triangular gun mounting can be seen its 20-round magazines stowed in side compartments.

An Unteroffizier gunner poses beside his 20cm Flak 30. This weapon had a practical rate of fire of 120 rounds per minute. The requirement to change magazines reduced its practical rate of fire. A belt-feed would have allowed a much higher rate of fire.

A 20mm Flak 38, an improved version of the Flak 30, is entrenched in a frontline position enabling it to fire on ground targets. Kill rings can faintly be seen on the gun barrel. Fir tree limbs cover the light-colored sand trench parapets, which would have otherwise been conspicuous to ground and aerial observation.

The crew of an 8.8cm Flak 18 gun relax in their position, two Obergefreite and a Gefreiter. There collar tabs and shoulder strap piping would be red on their blue-gray uniforms. The crews referred to their guns as the Acht-Acht (eight-eight) or the Otto-Otto.

Luftwaffen Flaktruppen, wearing assorted uniform components, take a rest break in the pit they are digging for their winter quarters. This would be a partly below-ground squad bunker (Gruppenunterstande). It would include bunk beds, a table, and stove. Behind them is a 16-man tent assembled from a like number of Zeltbahn shelter-quarters.

The crew of a whitewashed 8.8cm Flak 18 antiaircraft gun discuss what went wrong after a successful Soviet bomber attack. Cut fir saplings are used to camouflage the gun and its transporter carriages from marauding low-level fighter attacks.

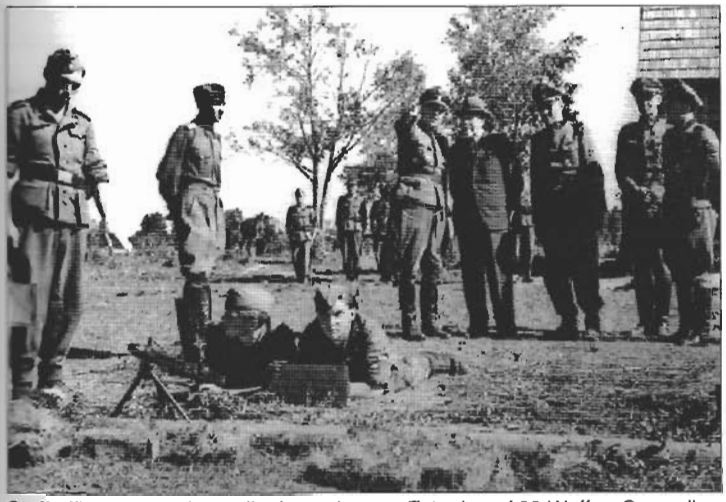
The crew of an 8.8cm Flak 18 antiaircraft gun unlimbers the big weapon from its pair of Sd.Ah. 201 limbers. The gun has been camouflaged with straw tied around it to break-up its silhouette.

A Luftwaffe general officer and his aide, a Leutnant, tour the frontline. The general is wearing a rather conspicuous white sheepskin overcoat. The braid, piping, and insignia on his service cap are gold-colored while other officers' would be silver-colored.

Hitlerjugend antiaircraft assistants or "flak helpers" (Flakhelfer) in their dark blue uniforms receive decorations from Luftwaffe officers for this part in the defense of the fatherland. In the background is their 2cm Flak 30. A Luftwaffe Gefreiter reads the citation for their awards. The Luftwaffe Gefreiter rank equated to a Heer Obersoldat.

A youthful Russian volunteer collects battle damaged Soviet weapons from a fortified position. On the trench floor is a battered Maxim 7.62mm PM-10 water-cooled machine gun on its wheeled Sokolov mount. Large numbers of weapons were damaged in combat. They were often recovered and if not repairable, were cannibalized for parts to repair useable weapon issued to Russian auxiliary security units in German employ.

Troops of the 14.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (galizisch Nr. 1). This formation was comprised of western Ukrainians from the former Austro-Hungarian Empire province of Galicia. A rampant silver-colored lion was displayed on their collar patch. They also wore a yellow lion and three crowns on a light blue shield on their left shoulder and a silver-color on black cuff band inscribed "Galizien". The soldier above is armed with a Soviet 7.62mm DP light machine gun and a German Stg 24 stick grenade. The Germans designated the DP the leMG 120(r). It was common for German units manned by former Red Army soldiers to be armed with Soviet weapons. The weapons and ammunition were available in large numbers and the troops did not have to be retrained on new weapons.



Staff officers escorting a dignitary observe Estonian of 20.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (estnisch Nr. 1) volunteers undertaking MG42 machine gun training. Estonians also served in the Waffen-SS 3.Freiwilligen-Infanterie-Brigade Estnisches. On the left upper sleeve can be seen (from top to bottom) black-edged light blue, black, and white cloth shield.

This Estonian Waffen-Unterscharführer, equivalent to a Heer Unteroffizier, displays the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross, a decoration too often bestowed on enlisted men much less non-Germans. It was known simply as the Ritterkreuz, but also the Blechkrawatte (tin-necktie) or Halseisen (neck-iron). The Waffen-SS wore a dual rank system, which included Heer-style rank shoulder straps for mutual identification and traditional silver on black SS rank collar patches. He wears the special collar patch of 20.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS.

A Waffen-SS Hauptsturmführer-equivalent to a Heer Hauptmann (captain) is presented the Iron Cross 2nd Class in the frontline. The Waffen-SS wore their eagle national emblem on the left side of most types of field caps and on their upper left sleeve rather than on the cap front and over the right breast pocket as the Heer and Luftwaffe. The Hauptsturmführer receiving the decoration wears an exception, the 1938 pattern field service cap. In the background lies an ammunition can holding three drum magazines for a Soviet 7.62mm DP light machine gun.

A Waffen-SS patrol returns through the lines amid a shell-blasted forest. They carry Kar 98k carbines from fallen patrol members and a much valued Soviet 14.5mm PTRD-41 antitank rifle. While technically obsolete, they were nonetheless effective against light armored vehicles and even medium tanks when side and rear shots could be taken. Its armor-piercing-incendiary ammunition was relatively effective. The Germans referred to it as the Panzerabwehrbüchse PzB 782(r).

An SS-Hauptscharführer - equivalent to a Heeres Oberfeldwebel - reports to a group of staff officers and his commander. Lack of uniformity was common in all units. Camouflage uniforms were supposed to be limited to troops at battalion-level, but officers at higher echelons often obtained them.

Waffen-SS combat patrols returns to its lines through a road gap barred by Spanish rider portable barriers. These are larger than the usual Spanish riders. When they were used to close gaps they were typically tied together by doubled barbed wire strains or ever chained together to make it more difficult for assaulting infantry to open the gap.

A German Police (deutsche Polizei) officer talks to enthusiastic Hitler Youth (Hitlerjugend). They wear their dark blue uniforms under dark blue greatcoats along with M15 World War I helmets. The Police uniform was a greener color than the Heer field gray.

A Volkssturm battalion leader (Bataillonsführer) talks a Volkssturmmann through the firing sequence of a Panzerfaust 60 as other under-enthused men look on. This is a non-firing training Panzerfaust with an actual launcher tube and firing mechanism with a wooden warhead. The firer's sleeve band is edged in red. The formation of the Volkssturm was announced on 18 October 1944 and all even marginally fit men between 16 and 60 years of age were eligible for induction. They were paid only when engaged in combat.

The Hitler Youth, comprised of boys from 14 to 18, were among the most enthusiastic and even fanatical members of the Volkssturm. They wear the standard Hitlerjugend dark blue winter uniform with the addition of the Volkssturm sleeve band.

This Volkssturmmann is armed with an 8.8cm RPzB 54 antitank rocket launcher, known as the Panzerschreck (armor terror) or Ofenrohr (stovepipe). This was a later version of the RPzB 45 and had a shield added. Note that the shield is incorrectly attached backwards. The launcher is painted dark yellow (tan). Volkssturm personnel wore any of the many paramilitary and militarized civilian organization uniforms with the addition of the Deutscher Volkssturm Wehrmacht sleeve band (white letter and edge on black-some had wider red edge strips). They also wore appropriate civilian cold weather clothing, usually of subdued colors (brown, gray, green, black).

A Hitlerjugend Volkssturmmann wears the HJ dark blue greatcoat with its distinctive left breast pocket, silver buttons, and black shoulder straps identifying the HJ unit. The armband is simply black printed on white. He is, unusually, armed with an MP40 machine pistol. It was seldom that Volkssturm units received mainline armament; some battalions had only 10 rifles of foreign manufacture and were fortunate to have ammunition.

Large numbers of Panzerfausten were issued to the Volkssturm here a Panzerfaust 60. The triangular insignia on the Hitlerjugend identifies the home district and was embroidered yellow on black.

Frontline training on the Panzerfaust 60. Convalescent soldiers recovering from wounds were often pressed into Volkssturm service, here a Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross holder. One collar star (pip) identified a Gruppenführer (squad leader), two a Zugführer (platoon leader), and three a Kompanieführer (company leader). The stars were to be on black collar patches, but often they were merely pinned on the collar. An organization like the Volkssturm tended to receive uncomplimentary names such as Magenbataillone (stomach battalions - owing to older men being assigned to units according to their dietary needs such as stomach conditions), Krüppelgarde (crippled guard), Versuchssoldat (experimental soldier - "experimentally used as sacrificial troops"), HJ-Spätlese (late vintage Hitlerjugend), and *Ersatzreserveersatz (replacement reserve).*

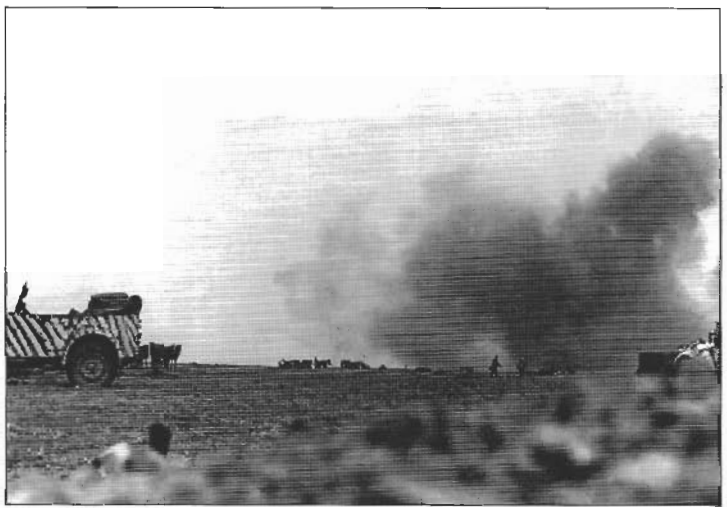
1945. Volkssturm personnel were sometimes attached to regular units to augment their strength. They were usually paired off with a veteran in hopes of making some good use of the untrained manpower. The regular soldier cocks his Panzerfaust 30 while holding down the sight, which will pop-up when the weapon's cocked. There were several range holes in the sight. The estimated range hole was selected and aligned with the top edge of the warhead and the target. The Volkssturmmänner wears an Italian helmet.

Some police units served as emergency troops. They are identifiable by their more pronounced green uniforms with brown facings. Also note the large number of tunic buttons; Heer tunics had only five front closure buttons.

An Oberst (colonel) questions a Leutnant during an inspection of an emergency unit (Alarm-Einheiten), an ad hoc unit raised from rear service personnel, soldiers on leave, and more or less recovered wounded on convalescence leave. Even Luftwaffe personnel were picked up for these units. Patrols would establish checkpoints as river bridges, major road junctions, railroad stations, etc. and collect together personnel for such last ditch units.

Russian log cabins, those that had not been long ago burned by the retreating Red Army, were necessary for shelter. As the Germans retreated, it was their turn to burn structures that might offer shelter.

The small, but hardy Bashkir pony became a mainstay of Wehrmacht transportation on the Eastern Front. The Russian term Panje for a wagon was adopted by the Germans to describe two- and four-wheel carts and wagons as well as sleighs. Here transport troops of a mountain division share a break with the Bashkir ponies. Note the traditional pipes, which many soldiers more often preferred than cigarettes.

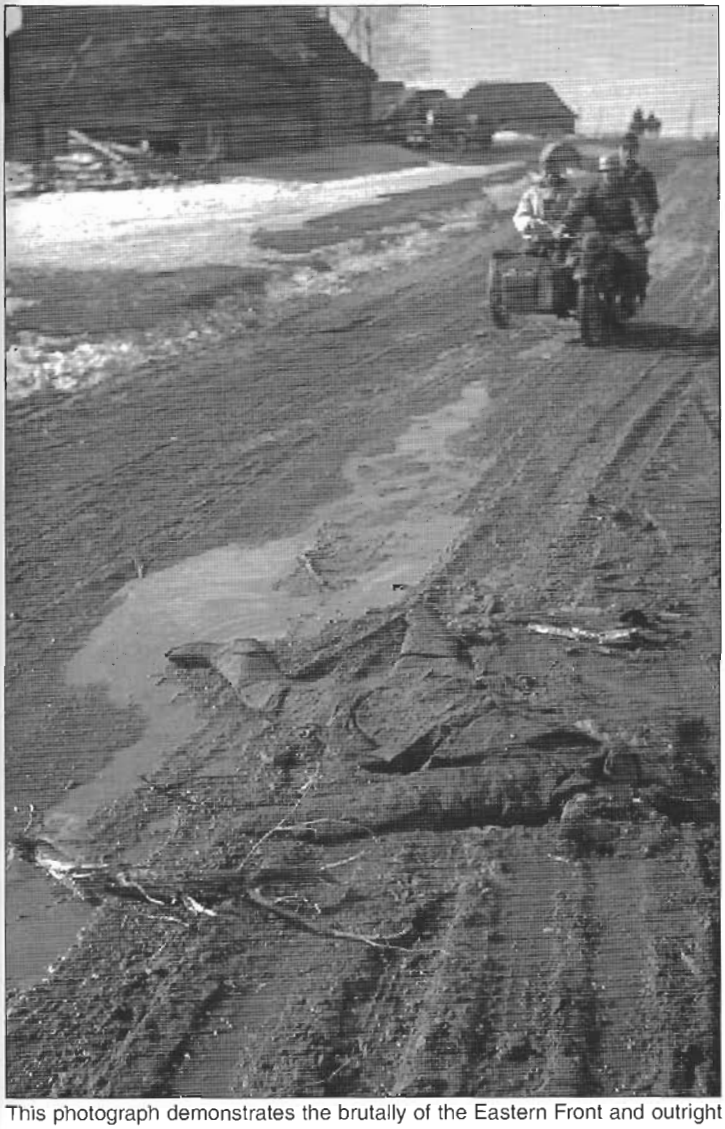


Supply stocks are burned before this transport unit withdraws. The Germans could ill-afford to burn their supplies, but often there was insufficient time and manpower (too many service troops has been used as infantry replacements) to load it or not even enough transport to haul it if there was. These light field cars were over-painted with whitewash bands on their field gray bodies. This pattern of regular strips was of little camouflage value and even attracted the eye. Irregular, natural appearing patterns were necessary.

A Hermann Göring Panzerkorps supply convoy passes through a Russian village. The available trucks were used for long-haul transport of ammunition, supplies, and material. Every civilian car and truck that could be found was commandeered.

Hermann Göring Panzerkorps truck driver watch a village burn, which is occupied by other service units, after a Soviet bomber attack.

Ethnic German civilians (Volksdeutsche) evacuate from Galicia in Eastern Poland. The German soldier called them Teilzeitdeutsche (part-time Germans). One of the soldiers directing traffic is a Feldgendarmerie (Field Gendarme) - military policeman. They were known as Kettenhunde (chained dogs) owing to the chain-like neck suspension for the identifying gorget chest plate.



This photograph demonstrates the brutally of the Eastern Front and outright hatred both sides had for one another.

Rail transportation was the main means of moving large units long distances on the sprawling Eastern Front. Rail lines were critical for withdrawing formations with all their equipment. Many vehicles and supplies would be lost to breakdowns and air attack if traveling by road. The Germans replaced many Russian signs with Germanized names.

Units became proficient in loading and securing vehicles and equipment aboard railroad flatcars. Soldiers assigned to service units were issued only one leather cartridge pouch rather than two as infantrymen. The three-pocket pouch held a total of six five-round loading clips, two clips to a pocket, for a total of 30 rounds.

A rifle company prepares to board a train. When embarking on such a trip the troops were issued a march ration of sausage, cheese, dried bread, coffee, and sugar in paper bags. Many of the troops wear Gefreiter and Obergefreiter chevrons, some of which are difficult to see as they are of more subdued colors.

In the late fall troops were issued insulated uniforms, additional blankets, and other winter gear, a much anticipated event as it began to cool in September or even earlier in the north. At the same time they would turn in their Zeltbahn shelter-quarters and sometimes received replacements for worn-out clothing.

Troops man-pack bundled rations through city streets to frontline positions. The rations, in cans, cartons, and sacks would be loaded in cloth bags used as makeshift packs. Loaves of bread would also be included.

Wiremen lay a field telephone line with the aid of a back-mounted wire reel. To reel up the wire it could be mounted on the chest by readjusting the carrying harness and reeled in with a crank-handle on the right side. It was provided a pack frame with a brown leather back pad. Friendly vehicles were as much responsible for damage to telephone lines as enemy artillery. Both the Germans and Soviets used black insulated telephone wire and often recovered the other side's wire for their own use. Both sides relied much more on field telephone than radios at the small unit level.

Comrades share a bottle of vodka. Rear service troops were not to be issued the insulated winter suit, but nonetheless many managed to acquire this popular comfortably warm outfit.

Armorers (Waffenmeister) work on damaged weapons, here an MG machine gun. With the number of weapons damaged in action, destroyed and otherwise lost as well as the poor resupply system, it was essential that weapons be repaired. They wear the two-piece denim work suit.

CONCORD
PUBLICATIONS COMPANY

ISBN 962-361-154-4